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A N  
A C C O U N T

O F A

Very infectious DISTEMPER pre-  
vailing in many Places.

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A C O U N T

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AN  
A C C O U N T  
O F A

Very infectious DISTEMPER prevail-  
ing in many Places.

**M**ANY years ago, a distemper appear-  
ed in this and some of the neigh-  
bouring counties, which, at first, gave no  
apprehension to those affected with it, of  
any thing more than a slight and com-  
mon ailment ; but was soon discovered  
to be of the venereal kind, or the *foul dis-*  
*ease*. It has prevailed ever since, in a  
greater or less degree, at different periods,  
in different places ; sometimes indeed a-  
bating both in strength and frequency ;  
it seemed to be so much upon the decline,

as to give hopes that it would intirely cease. But, if at any time it lay unactive, and, in appearance, almost extinguished, it was only to break forth again with redoubled force, or some new and more aggravated circumstances. Great are the perplexity and distress, the suspicion and terror caused by it where-ever it comes ; and hitherto nothing has been able to prevent the spreading of it. As this is a matter of general concern, because every one is more or less in danger, and no particular notice has been taken of the disease, it was thought proper, in this public manner, to give some account of it in its various appearances, the progress it has made in these parts, and how it is propagated ; in order to shew by what means it is most likely to be subdued, and, if possible, exterminated. It is believed to have been brought into the low country from the highlands, where it prevails under the name of SIBBENS or SIVVENS ; and tradition has it, that it was first introduced into that part of the kingdom, in the time of Cromwell, by  
the

the soldiers he put in garrison there. With us it is frequently, but improperly, called *the Yaws*; which is a very different malady. From a supposed difference of causes, some imagine, it is as improper to call it venereal. However, to express in some sort the nature of it, it is here classed with a disease, to which, if not the same, it has an exact resemblance, both in its symptoms and cure; and it is no less infectious.

1. IT first appeared here in the form of a sore throat, or an inflammation of the *uvula* or *pap of the hawse*, as it is termed, and neighbouring parts. The *tonsils*, or *almonds of the ears*, were often superficially ulcerated, appearing either raw, or covered with a white slough. Frequently, there was a thrush, that is, *white specks and sloughs*, upon the roof of the mouth and inside of the cheeks and lips, which commonly shewed itself at the corners of the mouth, in a small rising of the skin, of a pearl or whey-colour; where likewise a very small excrecence or *fleshy sprouting* like a rasp, often appeared,

appeared, which turns into a scab, and is a pretty sure sign of the disease, although there be no thrush or sore throat. Sometimes there was a hoarseness. The uvula has been destroyed by it. Children on the breast seized with it in the mouth and throat, perished for hunger, not being able to suck or swallow. In a few instances the submaxillary glands, or *kernels under the lower jaw*, have been considerably swelled.

2. ACQUIRING greater strength, and affecting more the habit, it appeared in the form of small pustules, or *blushes* of a dirty hue, which breaking left a dry crust, with blueness around, and ulcerated deep into the cellular membrane, or *fatty part below the skin*. Children mostly were the subjects of it in this form. These pustules chiefly occupied the belly, groins, and sides; sometimes they were seen on the face. The ulcers usually made but small progress; being, for the most part, no bigger than the top of one's finger or thumb; some long, some round, others irregular, and pretty clean, with slightly



slightly inflamed lips, or *edges*. In some instances however, running together, they spread to a great extent ; so that all the fatty membrane of the belly below the navel, has been laid into one large foul ulcer, with such intolerable and peculiar stench, that those in this condition might be said to be rotten before they were dead. In some children the whole scalp has been in a mortified state, the ears ready to drop off. Smaller ulcers formed likewise on the breast and face, covered with a purulent or *mattery* slough, and always remained in a dead state, without pain or inflammation, and hardly ever growing larger.

3. STILL increasing in malignity, it assumed another appearance. Boils here and there, suppurating or *bealing*, formed ulcers in different parts, in the arms, shoulders, face, legs, and feet ; and penetrated as far as the muscles or *fleshy parts*, leaving them quite bare, and seeming to eat superficially into them. They were of a high florid colour, without any matter to defend them, except a little ichor,

or

or *watery humour*, which made them exquisitely painful, and so tender, that scarcely would they bear the mildest application. The lips were hard and ragged. Some of them were very large, others but small; and, viewed singly, might easily have been mistaken for real cancers; but the number of them, sometimes the manner of their coming on, and other circumstances, soon determined to what kind of disease they belonged.

4. IT has been known, though rarely, to affect the bones, but never, with us, the large and more solid ones. Several have lost teeth with the sockets; and some of the bones of the cheeks and nose have come away. A portion of the *ala nasi*, or *gristly part of the nose*, has been destroyed by it.

5. WHEN it affected the skin only, penetrating no deeper, or very little, it appeared in various shapes. The whole surface of the body has been observed mottled or *flecked*, of a dusky copper-colour, or dirty red, as the discolourings of the skin in this disease commonly are.

Infants

Infants of the month have had a redness in the lower part of the belly, buttocks, thighs, and part of the legs; where sometimes it terminates abruptly in a ring, and has been suspected for the disease. In some of these there was an inflammation, and watery shining swelling of the pudenda, or *natural parts*. A more certain appearance in such subjects somewhat older, are broad red patches, as large as the palm of the hand, over all the trunk, as well as limbs, attended with inflammation. A cluster, or clusters, of small pustules come out; the skin grows dry and peels off, leaving a new tender skin beneath; and this will happen a great many times, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another. Scabby eruptions were often met with on the scalp, forehead; inside of the thighs, groins, and parts contiguous; where frequently small hardnesses, just within the skin, caused very troublesome itching. Inflammation, sorenesses, and excrescences about the fundament were frequent. It has appeared too on the breast, shoulders, and

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elsewhere,

elsewhere, as a *herpes exedens*, or *eating  
tetter* ; healing in one part while it broke  
 out in another adjoining, and leaving  
 great deformity of the skin. Of late,  
 some have been seen with tubercles, or  
*little hard knots*, upon the face, pretty nu-  
 merous, in figure and size resembling  
 small-pox at the height, but of a reddish  
 colour. They are attended with great  
 heat and tumor, so as sometimes to shut  
 up the eyes. One had them spread thick  
 over the whole body with matter, as in  
 the confluent small-pox, and died when  
 the swelling began to subside. In others,  
 when not so numerous, they gradually  
 decay without coming to matter. Some  
 have the tumor without tubercles; the  
 scarf-skin throwing off, from time to  
 time, in fine, white, net-like flakes, as  
 soon as renewed. From small bright red  
 spots, tubercles, redder than those just  
 mentioned, are produced. These run to-  
 gether in some places, and form a flat  
 smooth rising, which now becomes of the  
 usual colour of the skin, and may slight-  
 ly ulcerate. It shews itself likewise in a  
 foulness



foulness of the face of different kinds ; sometimes with the same sort of eruption over all the body.

THERE are other appearances and circumstances not so necessary to be known, as they may be thought too minute, or do not so generally occur, and therefore are omitted. One great symptom, however, must not be passed over, which, though it has never been observed here, is common enough in other places.

6. AN itchy tetter, or ringworm, breaks out in a round form, which, by scratching, or of itself, turns raw, and does not scab, but oozes an ichorous humour. In a short time a fungus, or *spongy substance*, sprouts up, much like a rasp or a strawberry, elevated one half above the surface, and, when fully formed, appears as if set in a socket cut in the flesh exactly to receive it.

BUT sometimes the sore is crusted over with a black scab, except at the edges, where there is a crack or ring, like the line of separation between a mortified and a sound part ; from which the same  
sort

fort of humour is constantly drilling. By degrees the crack enlarges towards the middle, and the scab, pushed off, gives place to the fungus just now described. At other times the spungy excrescences succeed a dark or grey scurf, resembling some kind of leprosy. The parts are very itchy, and, when made raw by scratching or otherwise, the flesh is allowed to sprout.

THESE sores occupy every part of the body, and many of them are seen in the same subject at the same time. But the excrescences do not always happen, and seem to be more frequently produced in the fore that never scabs, than in the scabby or scaley ones. They are rather indolent than tender to the touch; and their colour is not remarkably different from that of the fungus of other sores. From this berry-like rising in the venereal sore, the disease is said to be denominated the SIVVENS; *Sivven*, in the highlands, being a common name for a *wild rasp*.

HITHERTO the disease has been confined to the lower ranks. Some, however, of good condition have lost children by it; and, if great care is not taken, it may find a way into the best families. The young and the full grown are equally the subjects of this infection. Those of more advanced years seem less liable to be infected. The sex, from their tender frame, and children, for the same reason, are most susceptible of it.

It is propagated by using the same spoons and knives, and wiping with the same cloth, the infected have used, without cleansing or washing them; drinking out of the same glass or cup; smoking with the same pipe; sleeping with the infected, or in the same bed-cloaths they have lain in; and handling their sores; by sucking or giving suck; saluting or kissing; and fondling children, or feeding them in an uncleanly way. Nor is it unlikely, that, in certain circumstances, the breath may become infectious.

A proof that the disease is propagated chiefly by the want of cleanliness, is,  
that

that it has never got footing among those of better fashion, nor in towns, where, except with the very lowest, greater cleanliness generally takes place. Upon inquiry too, no certain appearances of it are discovered in those places nearest to us of the neighbouring kingdom, so justly celebrated for cleanliness. Another proof is, that sometimes it is observed to become more frequent after autumn. A company of reapers is made up of very different people, brought together from all parts. They eat and drink promiscuously out of the same cups and dishes; and a few spoons are made to serve a good many by putting them round from one to another. The same is done with a pipe in smoking. When the body is warm, and the pores open, the tender skin of the lips and mouth is most disposed to receive the infection, which the heat in labouring will render more active and apt to be communicated. A girl who had the thrush to a great degree, at this season, spread the disease through a whole



whole parish where it was not formerly known.

THE foregoing description of the distemper is so plain, that no body of common discernment can be at a loss to know it. The ways by which it is communicated are likewise so obvious, that the methods of prevention must be so too. As prevention is the principal thing in view, a few hints shall be suggested in relation to it. These duly attended to, may, in time, go a great way to extinguish the disease.

ALL masters and mistresses of families should be very attentive whom they receive into their houses as servants. Let them be sure that such are neither infected, nor have had any communication with infected persons or places. It belongs to them, moreover, in their families, to enjoin the most cleanly methods of doing, to set an example themselves, and to see that their injunctions be strictly observed.

SERVANTS, on the other hand, as their bread and characters depend upon it, ought

ought in all respects to recommend themselves by their cleanliness ; avoiding carefully, at the same time, all intercourse with persons and places where there is the smallest danger of infection. Any servant that comes into, or remains in a family, having the distemper and knowing it, must be deemed guilty of a crime, as the consequence may be highly injurious, and even fatal to others.

THOSE employed in harvest-work, making hay, or preparing fuel, and all labourers eating and drinking in companies, should be obliged to bring along with them every one a knife, a spoon, a dish, a cup, and a cloth to wipe with. Instead of eating all out of one dish, or drinking out of the same cup, they ought to be helped in a decent cleanly manner, into cups and dishes of their own. Let nobody smoak with a pipe that has been used by another.

SUCH as keep public-houses are, in a special manner, bound to observe the greatest cleanliness, both as a matter of prudence and justice. It is expected of them,

them, that they are never to offer to one what has been used by another in eating, drinking, or otherwise, till it is thoroughly cleaned again. And, in drinking-companies, every one should have his own glass. A gentleman obliged to do business in a low house, by drinking out of the same cup with others, caught the infection, and had almost been ruined before he knew what the disease was.

THE disagreeable custom of lying two in one bed should be altogether banished, unless the persons are well known to each other.

THOSE who put out their children to nurse, cannot be too nice in inquiring into the character and cleanliness of the persons to whom they are intrusted, and the condition of the place where they live with respect to the disease.

THE very uncleanly method of feeding children, so common among the meaner sort, ought instantly to be forsaken, as it is a likely way of communicating the infection, and more suited to the

fordid condition of mere barbarism, than the manners of a civilized people.

FROM perpetual custom, every one claims a right to kiss and fondle a child. Nurses, and all who have the charge of bringing up children, must be extremely cautious whom they admit to this familiarity, and positive never to allow it to strangers, especially of low rank, who, to procure favour, are often forward to shew, this way, an affected fondness.

MUCH more might be said with regard to cleanliness, and equally necessary to be observed, which will readily occur to those who have any taste for it, or a sense of the danger to which, by the neglect of it, they are exposed.

MANY, through fear of shame, and a criminal modesty, by concealing the malady, have suffered it to go a great length, to their own disquiet, and the endangering of others. In a lower degree, it may lurk in the body a long time harmless, till, strengthened by time and accidents, it becomes powerful enough to infect, even before there are any certain appearances,



ances, or suspicion of its existence. This hath often been the occasion of much surprize, as well as uneasiness, both to particulars, and in families.

WHENEVER, therefore, any signs of it are discovered, those who are so unfortunate as to have received the infection, if they regard their own safety, or the safety of others, are earnestly advised to apply, without loss of time, to the proper hands for a cure. In milder cases, a few doses of mercurial physic, and some external applications of the same nature, may so far weaken the symptoms, as to promise a cure; and, if the infection has not got beyond the lips, possibly may destroy it. But, for the most part, the distemper, sooner or later, returns, with greater force perhaps, or in a worse form. Experience shews, that it is proof against all such slight administrations; and not to be eradicated but by a regular course of medicine, judiciously adapted to the several degrees and circumstances of it.

THE method of cure differs nothing from that commonly practised in venereal cases. Mercury, given a longer or shorter time, seldom fails to remove the distemper. High salivation is not needful. Large doses of this remedy, and much spitting, unnecessarily fatigue and exhaust the patient. If the mouth is sore and watery, and kept at this pitch a proper time, a proper quantity of the mercury being thrown in, it is sufficient. Under such a management of it, the sick may live in a cooler way; because much warmth is always hurtful.

IN higher degrees of the distemper, indeed, the remedy must be given in greater quantity, or continued longer, to have an adequate effect, that is, to produce a free salivation; and, even after that, some symptoms may remain.

THESE are to be carried off by time, in the use of the Æthiopic pill, sarsaparilla, and the like. Such as cannot afford the sarsaparilla, may use a decoction of the woods, or that of bardana; which last is very fit to be drank during the  
course

course of the mercury. The remains of a sore throat, and other external ills, requiring it, yield to a fumigation of cinabar cautiously employed. The affections purely of the skin were treated with mercurial ointments and water.

To younger children, the *mercurius alcalifatus* was given once or twice a day, according to age, and other circumstances; purging now and then to divert it from the mouth, if it had a tendency that way. The sarsaparilla likewise was directed to these, if they would take it; and the *unguentum citrinum* to be rubbed upon scabs, excrescencies, or any foul sore.

THE solution of the corrosive sublimate has often been tried, allowing the patient to go abroad, but not with the desired effect. Among the lower people, it is hardly possible to prevent irregularities, and keep them to a method, without absolute confinement. When they submitted to this, calomel was always used, and sometimes the unction along with it. The sublimate, however,

may

may be useful to subdue the remains of the disease, and as an external application.

MERCURY, if possible, ought never to be administered, but under the immediate inspection of a person of skill; because the patient, by his own mismanagement, may bring himself into danger; or, upon a slight amendment, give over the course before the cure is perfected; and an imperfect cure gives afterwards a great deal of trouble. All the symptoms appearing again, another course of the medicine becomes necessary; but now it will not have such a certain and speedy effect, as the body has been accustomed to the use of it.

SOME very unaccountable notions have been held concerning this malady, and practices indulged, of which every one should be apprised and aware, as they have a manifest tendency to propagate the distemper, and greatly increase the malignity of it. It is imagined, that the disease cannot be so easily and compleatly cured as when it appears in the form of scabs, sores, eruptions, and the like  
dis-

disorders : for, by such methods, say they, nature throws out the matter of the disease ; which upon this presumption, is neglected in its milder states, and allowed to run on to a more dangerous height. It is imagined farther, that one may get rid of it by giving it to another ; and that its vigour decreases in proportion to the number of persons through whom it passes. But, which is still worse, because highly criminal in conduct, the infected often finding themselves unjustly reproached, avoided, and perhaps forsaken, are exasperated, and enjoy a malicious pleasure when they can involve others in the same calamity. Nothing surely can be more foolish, absurd, and wicked.

WHEN we consider the nature of it, the disagreeable circumstances that attend it, the many ways it may be communicated, how contagious it is, and difficult sometimes to subdue, a disease of such a kind is justly, no doubt, to be dreaded. Innocent sufferers, however, wretched enough already, should not be made more so, and, from an undue solicitude  
for



for ourselves, or an hard opinion of them, denied the common offices of humanity. On the contrary, those concerned ought tenderly to afford them the assistance of which they stand so much in need, in order to alleviate their distress, and bring it sooner to an end, which may be done without any danger. A little attention in point of cleanliness, as experience proves, will be a security against it. Were such a conduct always observed toward them, many, who now industriously conceal it, would readily discover their misfortune, and seek a cure, which, with kindly sympathy, every one should be encouraged to do. By this means the number of infected would daily diminish, and much infection be prevented.

A very hurtful practice has obtained with some. Vitriol, and other drying things, are applied to rawnesses, scabs, tetter, and excrescencies; by which, indeed, they may frequently be healed. But the matter thus repelled, and mixed with the humors, will cause great disturbance

sturbance in the body, or break out again some where else, in another shape; and with more violence. One having a slight rawness of a finger, handled an infectious sore, not knowing it to be so. The part put on a bad appearance. Great pains were taken to heal it; but the consequence was a sore throat, hoarseness, tumor, and ulcerations. This has happened to others from the same cause.

THE information now given is written at the desire of some who are much affected with the unhappy situation of the people in many places; and with a design, that all being acquainted of the danger, may heartily unite their endeavours to put a stop to the progress of so grievous a malady; and at the same time so disgraceful, as nastiness is the chief cause of its continuance and increase. The infected, except in higher cases, are, by a proper method, easily cured. Prevention, however, is the sure way to extirpate the distemper; and no-

thing else can avail. It is greatly to be wished, therefore, that the present and very pressing necessity may be a speedy means of promoting a more general system of cleanliness among those of certain stations who are well known to be deficient in this matter, and effectually prompt them to it: Their peace and safety, their interest and reputation, and the public welfare, are all connected with it. But, if the cautions and advice here offered, with the most friendly intention, shall notwithstanding be overlooked, or totally disregarded, miserable must be the condition of many! Still gaining strength, the disease will take deeper root in the constitution; grow obstinate to remedies; diffuse itself more universally; and really become, or get possession so early as to appear, hereditary. It will continue the plague of this generation, and be transmitted, with every circumstance of virulence, to posterity.

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